

ICRC RESPONSE TO COVID-19 NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

DECEMBER 2020



THERE IS NO HEALTH WITHOUT MENTAL HEALTH

2020 has been a year like no other in recent history. COVID-19 has affected every aspect of people's lives and placed colossal strain on physical and mental health, health systems, economies, livelihoods and social fabrics around the world.

"The COVID-19 health crisis has exacerbated the psychological distress of millions of people already living through conflicts and disasters. Lockdown restrictions, a loss of social interaction, and economic pressures are all impacting people's mental health and access to care."

Robert Mardini, ICRC's director-general

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement interviewed over 3,500 people in seven countries, including Lebanon, about the impact that the pandemic has had on their mental health. The people we interviewed in Lebanon had one message to pass: "[Mental health is just as important as physical health.](#)"



The combined effect of the war and pandemic may have a serious impact on the way children typically behave, or handle their emotions and problems, causing distress for years after the guns go silent. After years of living with the consequences of war, generations of children in the Middle East are in need of [psychosocial support](#).

HOW CAN MENTAL HEALTH BE IMPROVED?

Finding it difficult to manage how we think, feel and respond to daily stresses could be a sign of poor mental health.

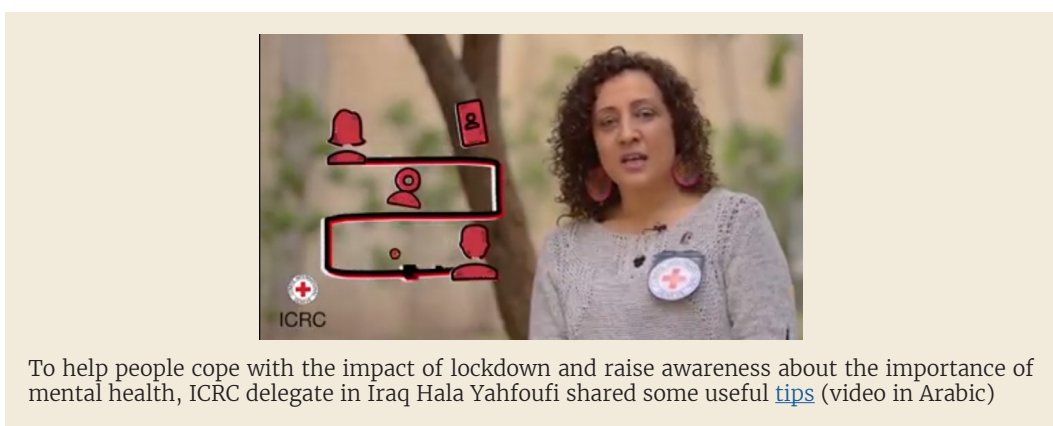
In addition to worrying about one's health, the loss of jobs, businesses and savings had a harsh impact on mental health in the past nine months, with an increase in symptoms related to depression, such as self-harming thoughts and hopelessness. The stigmatization of those with COVID-19 and refusal to believe that the pandemic is real, further complicated getting help.



“There are many reasons why people might not get the help they need right now, including not being able to access or afford services, language issues and a societal stigma around admitting they need to talk to somebody,” said Isabel Rivera Marmolejo, ICRC’s mental health delegate in Lebanon.



We observed that many psychosocial support programmes focused upon women and children, leaving men out. Sharing the do's and don'ts of mental health was the key to raising awareness about the issue and helping people seek support. ([Link to photo album](#))



To help people cope with the impact of lockdown and raise awareness about the importance of mental health, ICRC delegate in Iraq Hala Yahfoufi shared some useful [tips](#) (video in Arabic)

Over 1,000 people, including victims of violence, refugees and health-care providers received psychological support from the ICRC clinical psychology team in **Lebanon's** cities of Beirut, Akkar, Zhale and Tripoli. Since the Beirut explosion in August, we have offered psychological sessions to 200 people and have been operating a hotline for those who wish to access ICRC [mental health services and physical rehabilitation assistance](#).



The situation is particularly difficult for some of Lebanon's most vulnerable groups, including the 1.5 million population of [Syrian refugees](#). For many of them, the explosion was a distressing reminder of the conflict and instability they had fled, bringing flashbacks, nightmares and anxiety.



Our [call](#) for participation in the humanitarian reporting competition in **the occupied Palestinian territories** focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on young people's mental health, received almost 9,000 comments. We received 40 articles from male and female journalists from the West Bank and the Gaza strip. The three winners, who received cash prizes for their outstanding contributions, were [announced](#) in early November.

Together with the Society for Recovery Support (SRS), in **Iran**, the ICRC provided psycho-social and curative mental health services to almost 2,300 Afghan refugees in the city of Mashhad. Together with SRS, we distributed 2,500 posters, shared nine videos and 300 messages on closed social media groups to strengthen resilience and coping mechanisms of vulnerable refugee communities and the SRS staff caring for them. We provided curative mental health services for SRS staff and people showing psychopathological symptoms that were aggravated by, or resulted from difficulties caused by COVID-19.

WHEN HELPERS ARE IN NEED OF HELP?

Health-care workers found themselves under increased stress, dealing with the previously unknown pandemic while striving to protect themselves and their families the best way they could.

In addition to lacking adequate protection equipment and medical supplies to treat COVID-19 patients, they also had to counter people's lack of knowledge about the pandemic and the uncertainty surrounding it.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement produced information material that was distributed through the health structures supported by the ICRC across Iraq and shared via social media. The aim was to help health-care providers cope with stress, reduce stigma against COVID-19 patients and educate about both the pandemic and related psychological issues. More than 3,000 people across communities and health structures supported by the ICRC attended psychosocial support sessions.

In **Lebanon**, over 900 health staff and volunteers caring for COVID-19 patients were supported through individual and group counselling, while 5,000 more people received advice on improving their resilience via the social media.



After eight sessions of counselling through mental health and psychosocial group support, ten nurses, doctors and laboratory technicians treating COVID-19 patients at al-Hakim General Hospital in Najaf, Iraq, saw an average improvement of 85% in their psychosocial wellbeing, functionality, stress and coping mechanisms, as demonstrated by comparing pre- and post-tests. In implementing “[Help the Helpers](#)” programme, the ICRC coordinated with the Iraq’s health authorities, who will continue the programme.

In **Gaza**, upon the request of the Ministry of Health (MOH), the ICRC trained MoH staff in providing psychosocial counselling and added 12 hotlines to those already operated by the ministry. This led to provision of basic psychosocial support to almost 15,000 people in less than four months. We also printed 3,500 leaflets and 80 posters with advice on how to deal with COVID-19 related stressors.

HUMANITARIAN WORK GOES ON...

MORE THAN 1,000 FORMER DETAINEES RETURNED HOME TO YEMEN OR SAUDI ARABIA

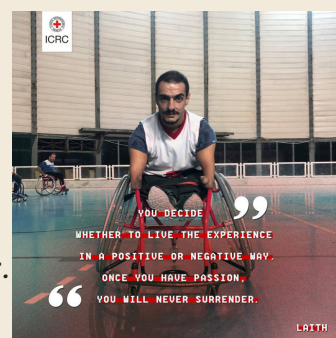
On 15 and 16 October 2020, as many as 1,056 former detainees returned home to Yemen and Saudi Arabia under the framework of the Stockholm Agreement and thanks to the logistical arrangement put in place by the ICRC. It was the largest such operation facilitated by the ICRC during a conflict in 70 years.



After months of meetings between the parties to the conflict and changing logistical arrangements, [the ICRC transported the former detainees](#) back to their countries, provided clothes and food and facilitated the reunification of many of them with their families. During the transfer, COVID-19 preventive measures were put in place and the detainees were explained how to protect themselves from contracting COVID-19.

WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT IN DAMASCUS

Eight teams from eight governorates of Syria, all beneficiaries of the ICRC's physical rehabilitation support, participated in a five-day [Wheelchair basketball tournament](#) in Damascus. We organized the tournament to support and encourage the participants, many of whom lost limbs due to the war.



SYRIA: Nearly 41,400 people in 10 governorates received [information on risks related to mines](#) and other explosive remnants of war. The sessions were delivered by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent teams that were trained and supported by the ICRC.



MANY FAMILIES STILL DON'T KNOW THE FATE AND WHEREABOUTS OF THEIR LOVED ONES...

KUWAITI authorities receive human remains from 1990–1991 Gulf War

Under the auspices of the ICRC and with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the State of Kuwait received [the mortal remains](#) that were found earlier this year at a burial site in Samawa district, Iraq. The remains are believed to be those of Kuwaiti citizens and prisoners of war gone missing during the 1990–1991 Gulf War. Once the anthropological analyses of the remains are completed, they will reveal the number of people they belong to and provide information about their identity.



LEBANON: Empty chairs, waiting families

Two years after the Lebanese parliament approved Law 105 on the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Persons, the ICRC – in collaboration with ACT for the Disappeared – launched a website, “[Empty chairs, waiting families](#)”. Around 225 empty chairs painted by families of the people who went missing during Lebanon’s armed conflicts since 1975 symbolize the empty spaces that the missing have left behind.

EMPTY CHAIRS
WAITING FAMILIES

كراسي فارغة
عائلات تنتظر

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EMPTY CHAIRS WAITING FAMILIES

The chairs were designed and painted by brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, wives, daughters, sons and even grandchildren of people who went missing in Lebanon during armed conflicts since 1975.

The memorialization project started in 2016 as a collaboration between ACT for the Disappeared, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Artichoke Studio.

The unknown fate and whereabouts of a loved one leaves the family in perpetual uncertainty, resistance and responsibility for it.

كراسي فارغة عائلات تنتظر

الكراسي من تصميم أشقاء الأشخاص الذين لفقوا في لبنان جراء النزاعات المسلحة منذ عام ١٩٧٥ وأبنائهم وأمهاتهم وزوجاتهم وبناتهم وأبنائهم وحتى أحفادهم ومن تفلحهم.

وقد أطلق مشروع تخليد الذكرى هذا في العام ٢٠١٦ بالتعاون بين جمعية للعمل من أجل المفقودين (Act) واللجنة الدولية للصليب الأحمر واستوديو أرتشي.

وتشعر العائلات بعدم اليقين الدائم نتيجة جهلها بمصير

Act for the Disappeared
المفصولون

ICRC

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: Adapting to the social distancing restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, we have continued to promote rules of international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles through online events.

Some 40 diplomats from the region attended virtually the [8th Regional IHL Course for Arab Diplomats](#), organized in cooperation with the United Arab Emirates IHL Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.




In a world that can feel increasingly divided, every individual action of solidarity, of lending a hand and supporting the other, counts – no matter how big or small it may seem. As the world’s largest humanitarian network, we know that collective local action can have a massive global impact.

مروية تاتاي دات انتر أسبست
المرافق في قوتها التكنولوجية والصناعية
والمهنية التي تلعب دوراً محورياً في ضمان
مستقبلهم الصحي. مسرور ياروف
يرافقهم في هذه التفتيشات
التي تركز على ظروف العمل
والصحة المهنية. كما يرافقهم في فحوص
الاحتياجات. أما ياروف فمن فحوص
في شكل تدريجي إلى فحوص
التي تركز على حالات الإصابة
(أزمة قلبية، وشمس، اختلال في
العمل، إصابة رياضية) في مركز
التأهيل الطبي في أوروبا من
إيطاليا. ياروف في المستشفى.

أوروبا الجديدة
مروية تاتاي دات انتر أسبست





 Year of the
Nurse and the Midwife 2020

RESPONDING AS PARTNERS

The pandemic has exacerbated existing hardships, made us question our priorities and recognize our vulnerabilities. As part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, working in partnership to counter the pandemic is more important than ever.



The Red Cross COVID-19 Care Centre in Aden, Yemen, offers free medical support to patients with mild and moderate symptoms, while referring critical cases to Al Jomhura ICRC-supported ICU section, when required. Since its opening in September, 300 people have been examined and 91 admitted to the centre, which the ICRC operates together with the Danish, Swedish and Finnish Red Cross.

The Movement has formulated concrete, practical and relevant recommendations for authorities and relevant stakeholders regarding COVID-19. in the document titled **“COVID-19 and Emergency Response in the Middle East and North Africa: Policy Recommendations from the RCRC Movement”**.



RED CROSS / RED CRESCENT ASKS & RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Call for an internationally-recognized vaccine which is safe, effective, affordable and equitably accessible
2. Services need to be prioritized for highly vulnerable groups, especially for populations already exposed to violence and conflict
3. Minimizing the restrictive measures that impact the humanitarian work (counter terrorism and sanctions)
4. Increased, and flexible funding for the International Movement to continue & enhance support to most vulnerable people in MENA
5. Invest in prevention and preparedness for COVID-19 and future crises
6. Duty of Care for frontline workers and volunteers must remain a priority
7. Response and humanitarian organizations should be given access, rights and exemptions to carry out and expand their crucial work
8. Respect and protection of health workers and first responders, including fighting against their stigmatization
9. Ensuring inclusive coordination mechanism between authorities and organization is essential when dealing with crisis

In the third online briefing to the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement partners and donors, the senior representatives summed up the Movement's response to the pandemic in the Middle East and North Africa.




Jose Antonio Delgado Ortiz @delgado_ortiz · Nov 19

#RCRC Movement in #MENA organized its third virtual meeting to update its ongoing response to COVID-19 pandemic in the region with participants from Embassies/Missions representatives, UN Agencies and EU Delegations. Thank you for your participation.

@FCarboniICRC @elsharkawi



The ICRC helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. The organization also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

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